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ABSTRACT

Socialization into sport has been viewed as a social learning process through which significant others teach, demonstrate, and reinforce sport roles and behaviors. This social learning paradigm has been synthesized into a social role-social systems approach which combines psychological and sociological indicators (family, peers, school, community). Studies of male socialization into sport indicate that this approach is a viable model and that the sport socialization process is invariant across cultures. However, findings pertaining to female socialization into sport suggest that the process is not consistent. A study of 110 female athletes and 244 female nonathletes at the University of Illinois identified several variables for determining factors in sport involvement: childhood sport involvement; present sport involvement; and peer, teacher, and family influence. Analyses revealed that the social role-social systems approach is applicable to female socialization into sport and that childhood influences on sport participation are considerably different for female athletes and nonathletes. An unanticipated result is the finding that the theoretical model provides a better explanation of psychological and sociological determinants of the lower sport involvement of nonathletes than it does for a higher degree of athletic involvement. Findings from the study support the notion that female socialization into sport is a volatile, inconsistent, selective, and extremely complex process which needs more research. (CJ)

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Female Socialization into Sport: Childhood Influences

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Conceptually and empirically, socialization into sport has been viewed as a social learning process through which significant others within specific social settings teach, demonstrate and reinforce sport roles and behaviors. More recently this social learning paradigm has been synthesized into a social role-social systems approach which combines psychological with sociological parameters. This latter theoretical approach represents a more dynamic and integrated perspective, whereby the social systems of family, peer group, school, and community are conceptualized as possessing specific values, norms, sanctions and opportunity sets which influence the learning of sport roles (Loy, McPherson & Kenyon, 1978).

Empirical investigations using the social role-social systems approach have substantiated findings from previous research. More specifically, data from a cross-cultural study of elite male athletes revealed that the family was not an important factor in explaining sport involvement; that peer influence and sanctions provided by teachers/coaches were; and that availability of facilities and coaching were critical factors in the process. More important, however, was the conclusion that the social role-social systems approach was a viable, hence valid, model and that the sport socialization process was invariant across cultures (Kenyon & Knoop, 1978).

In contrast, findings pertaining to female socialization into sport suggest that the process is not consistent; rather, it is quite volatile (Greendorfer & Lewko, 1978). Some findings appear to be contradictory, particularly those per-

taining to the importance of family and school. Whereas some studies have identified family and school as significant predictors of female sport involvement (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1973, 1976, 1978), others have indicated that peers and family, respectively, were influential while the school played a minor role--perhaps merely reinforcing sport roles learned elsewhere (Greendorfer, 1974, 1976).

It would seem, then, that some attempt is needed to reconcile these diverse findings and to explain why consistency and unequivocal results characterize sport socialization for males, while inconsistency and contradiction are more appropriate descriptors of female socialization into sport. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to: 1) determine whether or not the social role-social systems approach was applicable to female sport socialization, and, assuming its applicability, to 2) determine in which dimensions the process differed between female athletes and nonathletes.

Method: A fixed-alternative questionnaire was administered to 110 female athletes and 244 female nonathletes at the University of Illinois. The eight-page questionnaire had a test-retest reliability of r = .89 (Kemp, 1980) and was designed to tap behavioral and affective domains of sport socialization concepts as well as various childhood influences on sport behaviors. Nine constructs were formulated from the items: childhood sport involvement, present sport involvement, peer, teacher and family influence, and mother, father, brothers' and sisters' influence. The validity of these constructs was ascertained through an orthogonal rotation factor analysis.

Results: There were two phases of the data analysis, the first to determine whether or not both groups received similar childhood sport socialization influences and the second to examine the efficiency of the social role-social systems approach when applied to females. Results from several t-tests indicated that there was a significant difference between athletes and nonathletes on six of the nine sport socialization constructs. No differences were found in sisters', teacher, and peer influence.

Table 3, Transparency 1

In each comparison of means the athletes had a higher amount of participation or received a greater amount of significant other influence than did the nonathletes. Such differences suggested that the sport socialization process was dissimilar for both groups and that the subjects could not be pooled.

Childhood involvement. The first step-wise regression examined the social role-social systems approach in its most general form. The analysis revealed an identical ordering of predictor variables for the athletes, but not an identical contribution. Moreover, the model accounted for only 12% of the variance for the athletes but 37% for the nonathletes.

Table 2, Transparency 2

A second step-wise regression compared individual family member influence with that of peers and teachers. Although this regression indicated a substantial difference between athletes and nonathletes in the order and importance of predictor variables, the model did not substantially improve in efficiency for the athletes--$r^2 = .128$ compared to $r^2 = .124$ in the first regression.

In contrast, for the nonathletes, the amount of variance accounted for increased to approximately 41% (r^2 = .406 compared to r^2 = .374).

Table 3, Transparency 3

Summarizing the results on childhood, although the general social systems of peers, family, and school, respectively, influenced childhood sport involvement of athletes and nonathletes in a somewhat similar fashion, the social role-social systems approach was more effective in the case of the nonathletes. More specifically, lower childhood influences were better predictors of lower childhood sport involvement than higher childhood influences were of higher childhood involvement. Also, when individual family member influence was considered, the pattern between athletes and nonathletes differed substantially. As indicated in the above transparency, the pattern of strong support given to athletes seemed to come from each social system, whereas lower or less support given to nonathletes came from peers and male family members.

Present involvement. Childhood sport involvement was included as an independent variable in the analysis of present sport involvement. Again, the data demonstrated differences between athletes and nonathletes in the ordering and importance of predictor influences. Although childhood involvement was the strongest predictor for both groups, the direction or amount of involvement differed for each group (high predicted high for athletes; low predicted low for nonathletes).

Table 4, Transparency 3

In addition, the above transparency indicates a shift in predictive effectiveness of the model. For the athletes, childhood influences were more efficient predictors of present involvement (r^2 = .171) rather than of childhood involvement (r^2 = .124). In contrast, in the case of the nonathletes, the model decreased (r^2 = .267 compared to r^2 = .374), indicating that childhood influences were better predictors of childhood involvement than of adult involvement.

The second regression comparing individual family member influence with that of peers and teachers again demonstrated differences between athletes and nonathletes. As with the previous regression, the ordering of variables was dissimilar for each group. Moreover, the effectiveness of the model again improved for the athletes (r^2 = .231) but virtually remained the same for the nonathletes (r^2 = .279).

Table 5, Transparency 4

Discussion: The results of the analyses revealed that the social role-social systems approach is applicable to female socialization into sport and that childhood influences on sport participation are considerably different for female athletes and nonathletes. An unanticipated result, which appears to be somewhat paradoxical, is the finding that the theoretical model provides a better explanation of psychological and sociological determinants of the lower sport involvement of nonathletes than it does of a higher degree of involvement of athletes.

The obvious question is why. Although there are several explanations, two of the most plausible are presented here: 1) a high degree of female sport involvement may be more complex than originally believed, and 2) the social role-social systems approach is predicated on learning--through observation, imitation, and social interaction--of appropriate or expected role behaviors. In the case of females this expectation would be for low sport involvement. This explanation supports the notion that the system of sport has implicit and explicit in its value structure standards of performance and normative expectations more appropriately suited to male behaviors. Secondly, it suggests that the operationalization, if not the conceptualization, of the social role-social systems approach may inherently possess a normative bias--one which more adequately applies to males.

This conclusion is logical given the fact that the theoretical framework inadequately explains or captures a high degree of sport involvement for females. If the traditional indicators better explain lower levels of female sport involvement, then some expansion in the model is needed to remove the inherent bias. Items pertaining to sex typing, role identification, orientations toward mastery of motor skills, perception of sport competence, and definition of achievement within the sport experience might provide such an expansion and shed more light on the dynamics of the female sport socialization process. Perhaps such items would better capture the process as it also applies to males.

Secondly, the shift in the model's efficiency in predicting adult sport involvement is difficult to explain. Perhaps

the higher childhood influences which inadequately explain the athletes' childhood involvement are, nevertheless, pervasive and long lasting. Their effect seems to extend across life cycle stages. Although the first link in the chain of events, that which initiates the process, appears to insufficiently explain childhood participation, it seems to be critical. In contrast the lower childhood influences exerted on nonathletes not only have immediate effects, but also seem to have adverse long lasting effects. A very different chain of events takes place for athletes and nonathletes given the direction and nature of childhood influences.

In conclusion, findings from this study support the notion that female socialization into sport is a volatile, inconsistent, selective, and extremely complex process which needs much more research if we are to achieve any degree of understanding.

GENERAL FINDINGS

A CHILDHOOD

1) The Social Role-Social System Model accounts for more variance in the case of nonathletes rather than athletes
2) The ordering of variables is dissimilar for each group when individual family members are included in the comparison
3) In the general form the ordering of variables is similar for both groups, but the contribution of independent variables is not

B PRESENT

1) For both groups the strongest predictor of adult sport involvement is childhood involvement
2) However, the nature of the contribution of childhood involvement differs for each group
3) There is a dissimilar ordering of variables
4) The Model's efficiency increases for the athletes but decreases for the nonathletes

Table 3

t-Tests Comparing Childhood Influences of Athletes and Nonathletes

Variable	Sample	Mean	S.D.	S.E.	t-Value	df	Probability*
Present Involvement	Athletes[a]	11.89	2.44	.23	10.76	352	.000
	Nonathletes[b]	8.69	2.65	.17			
Childhood Involvement	Athletes	13.57	1.77	.17	7.32	280	.000
	Nonathletes	11.90	2.42	.16			
Father's Influence	Athletes	16.60	4.63	.44	2.47	181	.014
	Nonathletes	15.34	3.91	.25			
Mother's Influence	Athletes	14.63	4.21	.40	3.88	178	.000
	Nonathletes	12.84	3.47	.22			
Brothers' Influence	Athletes	19.32	7.79	.74	2.27	352	.024
	Nonathletes	17.29	7.79	.50			
Sisters' Influence	Athletes	14.17	5.81	.55	1.41	352	NS
	Nonathletes	13.23	5.82	.37			
Peer Influence	Athletes	22.25	4.31	.41	- .97	352	NS
	Nonathletes	22.75	4.55	.29			
Teacher Influence	Athletes	14.41	2.99	.29	.01	352	NS
	Nonathletes	14.41	3.02	.19			
Family Influence	Athletes	65.10	14.45	1.38	4.01	352	.000
	Nonathletes	58.98	12.72	.82			

*Two-tail Probability

[a]N = 110

[b]N = 244

STEP-WISE REGRESSION ANALYSES ON CHILDHOOD SPORT INVOLVEMENT

athletes	
peer influence	.097
family influence	.016
teacher influence	.011
	R^2 = .124

nonathletes	
peer influence	.246
family influence	.111
teacher influence	.017
	R^2 = .374

STEP-WISE REGRESSION ANALYSES ON CHILDHOOD SPORT INVOLVEMENT

athletes		nonathletes	
peer influence	.097	peer influence	.246
teacher influence	.016	father influence	.106
father influence	.010	brother influence	.029
mother influence	.003	teacher influence	.022
brother influence	.002	sister influence	.003
sister influence	.001	mother influence	.000
$R^2 =$	.128	$R^2 =$	.406

STEP-WISE REGRESSION ANALYSES ON PRESENT SPORT INVOLVEMENT

athletes		nonathletes	
childhood involvement	.121	childhood involvement	.217
teacher influence	.043	family influence	.046
peer influence	.005	teacher influence	.003
family influence	.001	peer influence	.001
	$R^2 = .171$		$R^2 = .267$

STEP-WISE REGRESSION ANALYSES ON PRESENT SPORT INVOLVEMENT

athletes		nonathletes	
childhood involvement	.121	childhood involvement	.217
teacher influence	.043	father influence	.029
mother influence	.015	brother influence	.016
father influence	.041	mother influence	.011
peer influence	.006	peer influence	.005
brother influence	.004	teacher influence	.002
sister influence	.001	sister influence	.000
R^2 =	.231	R^2 =	.279